

PIECES OF EIGHT

By Richard Le Gallienne

Being the Authentic Narrative of a Treasure Discovered in the Bahama Islands in the Year 1903. Now First Given to the Public.

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TO THE SHARKS!

Synopsis—The man who tells this story—call him here, for short—is visiting his friend, John Saunders, a British official in Nassau, Bahamas Islands. Charlie Webster, a local merchant, completes the trio of friends. Conversation turning upon buried treasure, Saunders produces a written document purporting to be the death-bed statement of Henry P. Tobias, a successful pirate, made by him in 1859. It gives two spots where two millions and a half of treasure were buried by him and his companions. The conversation of the three friends is overheard by a pock-marked stranger. The document disappears. Saunders, however, has a copy. The hero, determined to seek the buried treasure, charts the auxiliary schooner Maggie Darling. The pock-marked man is taken on as a passage for Spanish Wells. Negro Tom catches and cures a "sucking fish" as a mascot for the boat. He has the virtue of keeping off the ghost of the pirate who always guards pirate treasure. On the voyage somebody empties the gasoline tank and the hero starts things. He and the passenger clash. He lands the passenger, who leaves a manifesto bearing the signature, "Henry P. Tobias, Jr." With a new crew, the Maggie Darling sails and is passed by another schooner, the Susan B., and the hero lands on Dead Men's Shoes.

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

"I can't afford to give you that, Theodore."

"I'd die for dat," he declared.

"Take this handkerchief instead; but, meanwhile, my eyes were opening. 'Take this instead, Theodore,' I suggested."

"I'd die for dat," he repeated, touching the tie.

His voice and touch made me sick and afraid, just as people in a lunatic asylum make one afraid.

"Look out!" murmured Tom at my elbow.

And just then I noticed hiding in some bushes of seven-year apple trees, two faces I had good reason to know.

I had barely time to pull out the commandant's revolver from my pocket. I knew it was to be either the pockmarked genius or the engineer. But for the moment I was not to be sure which one I had hit. For as my gun went off, something flew down on my head, and for the time I was shut off from whatever else was going on.

"Which did I hit, Tom?" were my first words as I came back to the glory of the world; but I didn't say them for a long time, and, from what Tom told me, it was a wonder I ever said them at all.

"There he is, sar," said Tom, pointing to a long, dark figure stretched out near by. "I'm afraid he's not the man you were looking for."

"Poor fellow!" I said; it was George, the engineer; "I'm sorry—but I saw the muzzles of their guns sticking out of the bush there. It was they or me."

"That no lie, sar, and if it hadn't been for that suckin' fish's skin you wouldn't be here now."

"It didn't save me from a pretty good one on the head, Tom, did it?"

"No, sar, but that was just it—if it hadn't been for that knock on the head, pulling you down just that minute, that—that pockmarked fellow would have got you. As it was, he grazed your cheek and got one of his own men killed by mistake—the very fellow that hit you. There he is—over there."

"And who's that other, Tom?" I asked, pointing to another dark figure a few yards away.

"That's the captain, sar."

"The captain? Oh, I'm sorry for that. God knows I'm sorry for that."

"Yes, sar, he was one of the finest gentlemen I ever knew was Captain Tomlinson; a brave man and a good navigator. And he'd taken a powerful fancy to you, for when you got that crack on the head he picked up your gun and began blazing away, with words I should never have expected from a religious man. The others, except our special friend—"

"Let's call him Tobias from now on, Tom," I interposed.

"Well, him, sar, kept his nerve, but the others ran for the boats as if the devil was after them; but the captain's gun was quicker, and only four of them got to the Susan B. The other two fell on their faces, as if something had tripped them up, in a couple of feet of water. But just then Tobias hit the captain in the heart; ah! if only he had one of those skins—but he always laughed off such things as such."

"There was only me and Tobias then, and the dog, for the engineer boy had gone on his knees to the Susan B. fellows at the first crack, and begged them to take him away with them. There was no one left but Tobias and the dog and me, and I was sure my end was not far off, for I was never much of a shot."

"As God is my witness, sar, I was ready to die, and there was a moment when I thought that the time had come; but Tobias suddenly walked away to the top of the bluff and

called out to the Susan B., that was just running up her sails. At his word they put out a boat for him, and while he waited he came down the hill toward me and the dog, that stood growling over you; and for sure I thought it was the end. But he said: 'Tell that fellow there that I'm not going to kill a defenseless man. He might have killed me once but he didn't. It's bound to be one of us some day or other, but, despite me all he likes—I'm not such a curion as he thinks me; and if he only likes to keep out of my way I'm willing to keep out of his. Tell him when he wakes up, that as long as he gives up going after what belongs to me—for it was my grandfather's—he is safe, but the minute he sets his foot or hand on what is mine, it's either his life or mine.' And then he turned away and was rowed to the Susan B., and they soon sailed away."

"With the black flag at the peak, I suppose, Tom," said I. "Well, that was a fine speech, quite a flight of oratory, and I'm sure I'm obliged to him for the life that's still worth having, in spite of this ungodly aching in my head. But how about the poor captain there? Where does all his eloquence come in there? He can't call it self-defense. They were waiting ready to murder us, as you say. I'm afraid the captain and the law between them are all that is necessary to cook the goose of our friend Henry P. Tobias, Jr., without any help from me—though, as the captain died for me, I should prefer they allowed me to make it a personal matter."

"It's the beginning of the price," said Tom.

"The beginning of the price?"

"It's the dead hand," continued Tom; "I told you, you'll remember, that whenever treasure is there's a ghost of a dead man keeping guard and waiting till another dead man comes along to take up sentry duty so to say. The ghost is getting busy. And it makes me think that we're coming pretty near to the treasure, or we wouldn't have had all this happen. Mark me, the treasure's near by—or the ghost wouldn't be so malicious."

And then, looking around where the captain and the engineer and Silly Theodore lay, I said:

"The first thing we've got to do is to bury these poor fellows; but where," I added, "are the other two that fell in the water?"

"Oh," said Tom, "a couple of sharks got them just before you woke up."

CHAPTER VII.

In Which Tom and I Attend Several Funerals.

When Tom and I came to look over the ground with a view to finding a burial place for the dead I realized with grim emphasis the truth of Charlie Webster's remarks—in those snuggery nights that seemed so remote and far away—on the nature of the soil which would have to be gone over in quest of my treasure. No wonder he had spoken of dynamite.

"Why, Tom," I said, "there isn't a wheelbarrow load of real soil in a square mile. We couldn't dig a grave for a dog in stuff like this," and as I spoke, the pewterlike rock under my feet clanged and echoed with a metallic sound.

"Come along, Tom, I can't stand any more of this. We'll have to leave our funerals till tomorrow, and get aboard for the night"—for the Maggie Darling was still floating there serenely, as though men and their violence had no existence on the planet.

"We'd better cover them up, against the turkey buzzards," said Tom, two of those unsavory birds rising in the air as we returned to the shore. We did as well as we were able with rocks and the wreckage of an old boat strewn on the beach.

I don't think two men were ever so glad of the morning, driving before it the haunted night. After breakfast our first thought was naturally to the sad and disagreeable business before us.

"I tell you what I've been thinking, sar," said Tom, as we rowed ashore, and I managed to pull down a turkey buzzard that rose at our approach—happily our coverings had proved fairly effective—"I've been thinking that the only one of the three that really matters is the captain, and we can find sufficient soil for him in one of those big holes."

"How about the others?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I was thinking that sharks are good enough for them."

"They deserve no better, Tom, and I think we may as well get rid of them first."

So it was done as we said, and carrying them by the feet and shoulders to the edge of the bluff—George, and Silly Theodore, and the nameless giant who had knocked me down so opportunely—we skillfully flung them in, and they glided off with scarce a splash.

Then we turned to the poor captain and carried him as gently as we could over the rough ground to the biggest of the banana holes, as the natives

had undertaken no men have ever set their hands to. It would have broken the back of the most able-bodied navy; and when

we reached the boat at sunset we had scarce strength left to eat our supper and roll into our bunks. A machete is a heavy weapon that needs no little skill in handling with economy of force, and Tom, who had been brought up to it, was, in spite of his years, a better practitioner than I.

First we went over our stores, and, thanks to those poor dead mouths that did not need to be reckoned with any more, we had plenty of everything to last us for at least a month, not to speak of fishing, at which Tom was an expert.

When, however, we turned to our plans for the treasure hunting we soon came to a dead stop. The indications given by Tobias seemed, in the face of such a terrain, naive to a degree. Possibly the land had changed since his day. Some little, of course, it must have done. Tom and I went over Tobias' directions again and there was the compass carved on the rock, and the cross. There was something definite—something which, if it was ever there at all, was there still—for in that climate the weather leaves things unpreserved almost as in Egypt.

Sitting on the highest bluff we could find, Tom and I looked around. "That compass is somewhere among these infernal rocks—if it ever was there at all—that's one thing certain, Tom; but look at the rocks!" Over twenty miles of rocks north and south, and from two to six from east to west. A more hopeless job the

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"The beginning of the price?"

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CHAPTER VIII.

we were able to dig him a fairly respectable grave.

Tom and Sailor and I were now, to the best of our belief, alone on the island, and a lonesome spot it would be hard to imagine, or one touched by a beauty wraithlike and, like a sea shell, haunted with the marvel of the sea.

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CHAPTER VIII.

An Unfinished Game of Cards.

One evening as I returned to the ship unusually worn out and disheartened I asked Tom how the stores were holding out. He answered cheerfully that they would last another week and leave us enough to get home.

"Well, shall we stick out the other

week or not, Tom? I don't want to

kill you, and I confess I'm nearly all

in myself."

"May as well stick it out, sar, now

we've gone so far. Then we'll have

done all we can, and there's a certain

satisfaction in doing that, sar."

So next morning we went at it

again, and the next, and the next

again, and then on the fourth day,

when our week was drawing to its

close, something at last happened to

change the grim monotony of our days.

It was shortly after the lunch hour,

Tom and I, who were now working too

apart to hear each other's halloos,

had fired our revolvers once or twice

to show that all was right with us.

But, for no reason I can give, I suddenly got a feeling that all was not right with the old man, so I fired my revolver and gave him time for a reply. But there was no answer. Again I fired. Still no answer. I was on the point of firing again when I heard something coming through the brush behind me. It was Sailor racing toward me over the jagged rocks. Evidently there was something wrong.

"Something wrong with old Tom, Sailor?" I asked, as though he could answer me. And indeed he did answer as plainly as dog could do, wagging his tail and whining and turning to go back with me in the direction whence he had come.

"Off we go, then, old chap," and as he ran ahead, I followed him as fast as I could.

It took me the best part of an hour

to get to where Tom had been working.

Sailor brushed his way ahead,

pushing through the scrub with canine

importance. Presently, at the top of

a slight elevation, I came among the

bushes to a softer spot where the soil

had given way, and saw that it was

the mouth of a shaft like a wide chimney flue, the earth of which had evidently fallen in. Here Sailor stopped and whined, pawing the earth, and at the same time I heard a moaning underneath.

"Is that you, Tom?" I called. Thank

God, the old chap was not dead at all events.

"Thank the Lord, it's you, sar," he

cried. "I'm all right, but I've had a

bad fall—and I can't seem able to